

The Heart of a Servant Leader

Jaye Martin

We are servants first and leaders second.

The heart is the very seat of our soul, our emotions, and our passions. It is the very essence of our being and that which drives our thoughts and our motives. No wonder God tells us to guard our hearts. (Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. Prov. 4:23).

The heart of a leader is the foundation of his or her life. It is what drives her passion for the Lord and her passion for service in the kingdom. No doubt most of us feel called to lead in a deep way from the bottom of our hearts.

And yet, with seemingly little notice, out of our hearts can spew some of the most ungodly thoughts and attitudes—even in the midst of ministry. It was only a few weeks ago that something happened to totally unnerve me. Surely you know the feeling. I was less than thrilled with a situation (and in particular with one of many bosses) and was just about to share from the seat of my emotions the most spirit-filled reaction to what was happening when God intervened.

The person was not there for me to share with! And now I thank God for that. My spirit-filling was not coming from God; it was coming from the enemy. Even though I felt righteous in my motive, it certainly was not the best way to handle things. As leaders, we must be constantly aware that the enemy will do everything he can to render us ineffective in service to our Lord.

I had to come before the Lord and pray to him,

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10).

"Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name" (Ps. 86:11). "Refresh my heart in Christ" (Phil. 1:20b). God gave me his promise in response,

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:26).

To be a servant leader, we need to keep in mind that we are servants first and leaders second. We must learn to model Christ-like servanthood in every situation. God has chosen us to lead. Not only must we be strong and do the work, we must be strong in our wholehearted devotion to him and remember who we are working for! He is in control of every situation.

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Col. 3:23-24).

—Jaye Martin serves as director of women's leadership at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) in Louisville, Kentucky; adapted from our sister site Gifted for Leadership, © 2009 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.giftedforleadership.com.

Discuss

1. How would you describe your heart? What attitudes and feelings most often reside there?
2. What does it look to be a servant first and a leader second? Is this something you consciously think about in your ministry?
3. How does servanthood relate to your call to leadership?